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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PORT AU PRINCE 000887

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/CAR, DRL, S/CRS,  
INL FOR KEVIN BROWN, HEATHER WILD AND MEAGAN MCBRIDE  
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SUBJECT: LESPWA STALLS POLITICAL PARTIES LAW

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. LESPWA has stalled progress in Parliament on the draft political parties law, as the approval of the current version would undermine the preferential access and influence it has as the party allied with President Preval. The proposal would reduce the number of political parties and regulate party financing and administration, but could also be used as a political tool to sideline the weak and fractious opposition. LESPWA's majority in the Senate ensures that any reform of the political parties law will be on its terms. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) The Chamber of Deputies approved, before the end of its regular session, a law on political parties aimed at regulating, financing and reducing the number of political parties in Haiti. The main features of the law are outlined below.

¶3. (U) The law as drafted would require political parties to gather a minimum of signed endorsements equivalent to five percent of the electorate. This would amount to about 200,000 signatures, compared to the 5,000 required now. In effect, few political parties could meet this criterion (Note: Less than 500,000 Haitians voted in the last Senatorial elections, and none of the parties garnered anywhere near 200,000 votes in support). It is probable that the five percent threshold will be reduced before passage.

¶4. (U) In addition, political parties would be required to appoint a legal representative and officially publish their internal rules. All political parties would also be required to re-register after the law is passed, thus complicating the fortunes of parties like Fanmi Lavalas, whose leadership is internally contested (the Provisional Electoral Council excluded Lavalas from the previous senatorial elections on these grounds).

¶5. (U) In terms of financing, the law would earmark one percent of state revenues for the funding of political parties (about USD 10 million a year). Major political parties such as LESPWA could receive up to USD 2 million, while smaller regional movements (if they've managed to get recognized) would only receive a marginal amount. Campaign

financing is not addressed by the political party law (Note: the electoral law, already in effect, provides state financing to candidates, while the new political party law would fund parties directly. Currently, the GOH provides little financing to candidates - about USD 2,000 - and payments end up being made after the elections are over).

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT. The proposal, if adopted, could bring welcome changes, significantly reducing political parties, forcing alliances and mergers, and eventually encouraging the development of policy-oriented platforms. However, objections are already being voiced as many parties fear being put out of business.

¶7. (SBU) More importantly, LESPWA (President Preval's party) has used its majority to stall the progress of the law in the Senate, and changes are likely to be made to the proposal. LESPWA is in fact content with the status quo, especially ahead of upcoming legislative and presidential elections in ¶2010. Many observers believe that LESPWA's ties to Preval and its influence guarantees that it has access to government resources for campaigning (it was widely reported that LESPWA candidates benefited from government vehicles and other resources in the run-up to senatorial elections this summer). Should the law pass, opposition parties would benefit financially, something LESPWA and Preval have no incentive to see happen.

¶8. (SBU) Some version of the law is likely to be passed before next year. LESPWA will remain the predominant force both in Parliament and in the political arena ahead of next year,s elections, unless parliamentarians not affiliated with LESPWA join forces. This becomes especially likely if smaller political parties are prevented from registering. However, despite LESPWA,s increasing influence, electoral

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prospects remain unpredictable.  
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